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The Wise Old Weaver

One day the padişah was watching his capital from the balcony of his palace. As he looked around the city, his eye was caught by a flag which was waving above a house. This flag was unlike any that was known to the padişah. He ordered one of his attendants to go to that house and find out what the flag was. One of his attendants found the house with the strange flag, and knocked on its door. When the door was opened for him, he asked if he could be allowed to come in and sit down for a few minutes to discuss some business. He was shown into the house by an old man with white hair and a sparse beard, and he was asked to sit in a chair.

The old man then went back to his loom, sat down again, and began to weave. The palace attendant noticed that the old weaver's trousers were muddy. He wondered why they were muddy and he asked him, "Why don't you clean the mud off of your trousers?"

The old man explained as follows: "You see, there are many rat holes in the walls of my house. To stop them I mix mud with my feet while I sit here working the loom with my hands, and because of this I get my trousers soiled with mud."

"Very well," said the palace attendant. "But what about this pole that goes straight up through the ceiling?"

"That pole has a flag on the end of it, and by waving the flag I am able to keep the birds away from the washed wheat that my wife has spread on the roof to dry. The pole is attached to the loom here, and by moving from side to side while I work I am able to shake it enough to frighten the birds away."

The palace attendant was amazed at this and he said to the old man, "But what about the string that is tied to your finger?"

"Ah," said the old man, "that is attached to the child's hammock. My wife goes to the bath at this time of the day, and she leaves the baby for me to attend. This is how I rock the baby to sleep by pulling on the string.

"Well," said the padişah's attendant, "who are the children with the books in their hands sitting over in the corner?"

"They are the neighbors' children whom I am teaching while I work here," said the old man.

The palace attendant was greatly impressed with this old man who could carry on five activities at the same time. He thanked him for his hospitality, and left his house. He returned to the palace and reported to the padişah what he had seen.

The padişah said to the attendant, "Take a note to that man. I want him here with me in the palace. We may need such an ingenious man in the future. The attendant did as he was told, and the old man was given a job in the palace.

Some time later a stranger came to the palace, drew a circle in the courtyard, and then sat in the middle of the circle. This man disregarded all questions asked of him, and no one was able to find out who he was, or what it was that he wanted. He just sat in the middle of the circle and kept quiet. Many people tried to make the stranger talk, but they all failed. Upon this, the padişah asked one of his attendants to bring the old weaver to him.

The weaver was brought from his home, and the padişah explained to him that this stranger had come to the palace, had drawn a circle, and was

sitting in the middle of this circle without saying a word. The padişah asked the weaver if he would make the man talk and explain what it was that he wanted, or what it was that he meant.

The weaver thereupon went to his hen house, caught a cock, and put it under his arm. Then he took two walnuts and put them in his pocket. Then he went to the garden of the palace where the stranger was sitting. By this time the padişah had had his throne moved to the garden of the palace, too, so that he could watch the weaver try to make the stranger explain his purpose.

When the weaver arrived, he took a stick and drew a circle inside the circle that had been drawn by the stranger and then he sat in that inner circle. Everyone was watching what the weaver was doing in great amazement. The stranger took a handful of millet from his pocket, at that point, and scattered it on the ground. Upon this, the weaver let loose of the cock which he had hidden under his gown, and the cock began to pick up the grains of millet from the ground. When the stranger saw this, he said, "But there will be blood shed!" Upon this the weaver took out of his pockets the two walnuts which he had brought and he threw these upon the ground. When the stranger saw this, he shouldered his bag, and left, and since the weaver's work was over, he put the walnuts back in his pocket, put the cock under his arm again, and went back to his own house.

The padişah, like everybody else, was greatly surprised and puzzled with the things that they had seen. They could not understand how the two men had communicated with each other, and so the padişah ordered that the weaver be recalled to the palace. The weaver returned and was taken to the presence of the padişah. When the padişah asked him to explain all that had

happened, the weaver said this: "Your majesty, this man is an infidel Muscovite."¹ By drawing a circle and sitting in the middle of it he meant that the world was his. But then, I drew a little circle in his and sat in it, by which I meant to say that we are also a nation and that we had a right to occupy part of that world. When he scattered a handful of millet on the ground he meant that he had many soldiers. I let the cock loose, which ate the millet which he had scattered, and that meant that we had many heroes who could defeat those soldiers of his. Then, he said, 'But there will be blood shed!' Upon this, I threw the two walnuts upon the ground. By this I meant that I was willing to venture my testicles on the outcome."

Very impressed with the weaver's explanation, the padişah said this to him: "In this city of mine, where dwell over a million and a half people, nobody but you was able to solve this problem. Therefore, you may ask of me whatever you wish, and I will grant it to you."

"Your majesty," said the weaver, "I want nothing but health for you for the rest of your life. I am a weaver, and I can manage to get along that way, especially with the additional job which you have given me in the palace."

"No," said the padişah, "padişahs should give gifts to those who render service to them."

"Well then, your majesty," said the weaver, "here is my wish. Give me a charter in which it will be written, 'This man will receive one kuruş from anyone who is a weaver and two kuruş from anyone whose name is Hasan, one kuruş from anyone who is bald, and one kuruş from anyone who has two wives.'"

"There is nothing easier than that, my man," said the padişah, and he

¹Moskof gavuru was the expression used by the narrator, meaning the non-Moslem from Moscow.

ordered that a charter be drawn up for the weaver with these stipulations in it. The padişah then stamped it with his seal. The weaver put the charter in his pocket and went down to the market place.

When he reached the market place he saw a weaver there who was selling some sheets that he had woven. "You must pay me one kuruş," said the old man to the person selling the sheets. When the man asked him why, he said, "Because you are a weaver."

"Why do you want me to pay one kuruş?" asked the man. "I have children, and two wives to support."

"Well, in that case," said the old man, "You will have to pay me another kuruş for that."

"For what?" shouted the younger man.

"For the fact that you have two wives," said the old man

When the man selling the sheets refused to pay the money, the two began to quarrel. The clever old man hit the other weaver's fez and knocked it down. When this happened he saw that the younger man was also bald, and he said to him, "Now you must pay me another kuruş. That will make three kuruş that you must pay me."

"Why is this?" asked the younger weaver, in great anger.

"This is because your head is bald," said the older man.

Now there were many weavers in the land, and there were many men that had two wives, and many of these men were bald, especially since there was very little sanitation in those days.² It was also the case that there were a great many men named Hasan, just as there are today. As a result of this the old man became rich very soon. As a matter of fact, the problem that he

²A type of dermatitis of the scalp causing baldness is very common in parts of Turkey. It is often attributed, correctly or incorrectly, to a lack of sanitation.

caused soon became a national problem. One day the padişah discovered that there was a large crowd of people in front of the palace shouting, "We want you to take the taxing charter away from the weaver We want you to take the taxing charter away from the weaver!"

When the padişah realized what was happening, he called the weaver to his presence. When the old man came, the padişah asked him, "What sort of trouble is this that you are causing me? Is it true that you are collecting so much money from my subjects that they are ready to rebel in this way?"

"Yes, your majesty, that is true," said the old man.

"Well, then, why do you persist in this? Have I not treated you very well in the past?"

"Yes, your majesty," said the old man, "you have. I have done this, however, to give you a lesson. There are certain evils in this world which are discovered quickly, and there are others which take a long time to discover."

The padişah at first was very angry with the old man for his arrogance, and he had him thrown in jail. He took the charter away from him, and so the clamor of his subjects ceased; but the padişah was a good man, and he realized, after a while, that the old man was indeed a wise person, and he released him from the jail again. After this, the old man became one of his most trusted vezirs